

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 0699

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, HO

SUBJECT: SITRATERCO PRESIDENT OSCAR GALE'S PROPOSAL OF OPPOSITION
UNITED FRONT

SUMMARY: IN FEBRUARY 19 CONVERSATION WITH LABOFF,
SITRATERCO (UNITED BRANDS UNION) PRESIDENT OSCAR GALE
SAID THAT HE WILL PROPOSE THE FORMATION OF A
BROADLY
BASED OPPOSITION MOVEMENT TO URGE A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL
GOVERNMENT AT AN UPCOMING MEETING OF THE CTH EXECUTIVE
COUNCIL. THE MOVEMENT WOULD INCORPORATE LABOR, CAMPESINO,
AND PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPATION IN AN EFFORT TO PUSH
FOR MILITARY WITHDRAWAL FROM CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT
WHILE PREVENTING A RETURN OF GOVERNMENT BY THE "CORRUPT"
TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES. END SUMMARY.

1. IN A FEBRUARY 19 CONVERSATION WITH LABOFF AT
SITRATERCO HEADQUARTERS IN LA LIMA, SITRATERCO (UNITED
BRANDS UNION) PRESIDENT OSCAR GALE SAID THAT HE EXPECTED
TO OPROPOSE TO LABOR LEADERS FROM THE NORTH COAST FEDERA-
TION, FESITRANH, AND ANACH (CAMPESINO/ORGANIZATION) DURING
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A CTH EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEETING ON FEBRUARY 22, THE FORMA-

TION OF A BROADLY-BASED OPPOSITION MOVEMENT AIMED AT THE EVENTUAL RETURN OF CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT TO HONDURAS. GALE WILL SUGGEST TO FESITRANH PRESIDENT CELEO GONZALEZ AND ANACH LEADERS REYES RODRIGUEZ AND ANTONIO JULIN THAT INITIATIVES BE TAKEN TO FORM A FRONT COMPOSED OF LABOR, CAMPESINO AND PRIVATE SECTOR ELEMENTS TO WORK FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE MILITARY FROM CONTROL OF THE GOH.

2. THE IDEA TO FORM AN OPPOSITION GROUP IS PARTLY THE RESULT OF A MEETING OF THE LEADERSHIP OF ANACH FEBRUARY 15 AND 16 HELD TO ANALYZE THE NEW GOH AGRARIAN REFORM LAW. GALE WAS PRESENT DURING THE MEETING IN WHICH ANACH DECIDED THAT THE LAW AS PRESENTLY CONSTRUCTED SERIOUSLY THREATENS THE EXISTENCE OF ANACH IN ITS PRESENT FORM BY REQUIRING THAT CAMPESINOS BE FORMED INTO SPECIFIC KINDS OF COOPERATIVES IN ORDER TO BENEFIT FROM THE LAW. GALE REGARDS THIS AS AN OBVIOUS MOVE ON THE PART OF THE GOH TO DOMINATE THE CAMPESINO POLITICALLY, AS HE SAYS WAS DONE IN CHILE AND COLOMBIA. IN THESE COUNTRIES, GALE SAYS, THE GOVERNMENTS SUCCEEDED IN DESTROYING THE CAMPESINOS AS A POLITICAL FORCE. GALE CONCLUDED THAT IF STEPS ARE NOT TAKEN TO EFFECTIVELY OPPOSE THE GOVERNMENT, ASIDE FROM THE CURRENT FOREDOOMED EFFORTS OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES, THE MILITARY WILL INSTITUTIONALIZE ITSELF AND HONDURAS WILL TURN INTO A PERMANENT MILITARY DICTATORSHIP. HE FEELS THAT THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT CURRENTLY NEEDS THE POLITICAL SUPPORT OF THE LABOR AND CAMPESINO MOVEMENTS BUT THAT IF EVENTS CONTINUE IN THEIR CURRENT DIRECTION THE MILITARY WILL BE ABLE TO GOVERN INDEPENDENTLY. THIS WOULD THREATEN THE VERY EXISTENCE OF THE DEMOCRATIC TRADE UNION MOVEMENT.

3. GALE SAID THAT HE HAD ALREADY SET UP AN APPOINTMENT IN THE NEAR FUTURE WITH GABRIEL MEJIA (A KEY SAN PEDRO SULA BUSINESS LEADER) AND THAT HE WOULD EVEN TALK WITH JORGE LARACH (PUBLISHER OF THE CONSERVATIVE SAN PEDRO SULA NEWSPAPER, LA PRENSA) ALTHOUGH THEY ARE LONG-TIME ENEMIES. HE SAID THAT EDGARDO DUMAS (BUSINESS FIGURE AND FORMER MINISTER OF LABOR AND OF ECONOMY) WOULD PARTICIPATE, IMPARTING THE IMPRESSION THAT HE HAD ALREADY TALKED TO DUMAS. THE ORGANIZATIONS THAT GALE LISTED AS LIKELY PARTICIPANTS IN THE OPPOSITION GROUP INCLUDED THE PRIVATE ENTERPRISE

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COUNCIL, COHEP, THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF CORTES AND THE CATTLEMAN'S ASSOCIATION, FENAGH.

4. GALE SAID THAT HE HAD NO INTENTION OF FORMING A GROUP THAT WOULD WORK FOR A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD MEAN A BUSINESS-AS-USUAL GOVERNMENT BY THE TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES. HE ANTICIPATES A KIND OF CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY WITH DELEGATES REPRESENTING SOCIAL

FORCES. GALE ALSO SAID THAT THEY WILL HAVE TO PROVIDE THE MILITARY WITH A GRACEFUL EXIT. HE ADDED THAT IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO HAVE A MORE BROADLY-BASED GROUP THAN THEY HAD "THE LAST TIME" THEY OPPOSTED THE GOVERNMENT.

5. COMMENT: CLEARLY THE FORMATION OF THIS TYPE OF OPPOSITION FORCE WAS A RELATIVELY NEW IDEA ON GALE'S PART. HIS PRIMARY CONCERN IS THAT IN HIS VIEW DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT ARE SERIOUSLY THREATENED BY THE NEW AGRARIAN REFORM LAW AND THE PHILOSOPHY IT REPRESENTS. THE LIKELY RESPONSE OF THE OTHER LABOR LEADERS TO THE GALE INITIATIVE IS UNCERTAIN, BUT DURING A CONVERSATION WITH FESITRANH'S CELEO GONZALEZ THE SAME DAY, HE EXPRESSED SIMILAR CONCERNS ABOUT THE COUNTRY'S FUTURE. BY "THE LAST TIME" GALE COULD HAVE BEEN REFERRING TO THE 1972 ANACH MARCH ON TEGUCIGALPA WHICH TRIGGERED THE LOPEZ COUP AGAINST THE CRUZ GOVERNMENT OR A GENERAL STRIKE IN 1968 BY THE LABOR MOVEMENT AND THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY ON THE NORTH COAST AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OF THEN PRESIDENT OSWALDO LOPEZ. THE 1968 STRIKE FAILED WHEN LOPEZ SENT TROOPS TO THE AREA AND RESULTED IN THE TEMPORARY EXILE OF CELEO GONZALEZ. FOR GALE TO ONCE AGAIN CONSIDER SUCH A COURSE INDICATES THE SERIOUSNESS WITH WHICH HE REGARDS THE CURRENT NATIONAL SITUATION.

6. IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE WHAT SUCH A COALITION OF OPPOSITION ELEMENTS COULD DO TO CAUSE THE MILITARY TO WITHDRAW FROM POWER RATHER THAN RETALIATE WITH FORCE AS WAS DONE SUCCESSFULLY IN 1968. ALSO, GIVEN HONDURAN HISTORY, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT AN EFFECTIVE AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT CAN BE CONSTRUCTED ON THE BASIS OF REPRESENTATION BY SUCH DIVERSE SOCIAL FORCES AS CONCEIVED BY GALE.
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